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The paradox of religion

















Hibbert Lectures, 1927

THE PARADOX OF  
RELIGION



# THE PARADOX OF RELIGION



BY

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WILLARD L. SPERRY

DEAN OF THE THEOLOGICAL SCHOOL IN  
HARVARD UNIVERSITY

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## PREFACE

THESE two lectures were delivered during the early months of 1927 before general audiences in Sheffield, Liverpool, and Birmingham. A few slight revisions have been made for printing.

The Hibbert Trust has my sincerest thanks both for this honour and for this opportunity. My immediate predecessor in this particular series of Hibbert Lectures is Principal L. P. Jacks. My friendship for him leads me to hope that the torch of high courage which he has carried up and down England, as he has given these lectures during the last four or five years, has not quite gone out in my less steady hands.

The Reverend William H. Drummond, Secretary of the Trust, was unfailingly kind in his preparations for the actual delivery of the lectures in each of these cities. In so far as they were attended by any initial success the credit is due to his careful arrangements for each occasion, and not to my contribution. I have given him my thanks previously and privately. I am happy to record those thanks again in this connection.

The lectures, at the times and places of their delivery, gave me many new friends as hosts,

chairmen, and hearers. I shall always remember them with pleasure and gratitude.

As for the substance of what was then said, and what is here reproduced, these lectures certainly propound no novelties. They have no particular apologetic intention. They want the incisive cutting edge of sectarianism. They are at the most rather meditative second thoughts upon our common lot. And their occasion was, for me, far more significant than their substance.

Both in England and America we are passing through years when men who care about religion must read the signs of the time accurately. The more garish facts are not the whole truth or the most important truth. Often we have to look twice. When we look the second time we find that little happenings, which in other less perplexed years passed unnoticed, now take on a new meaning and value.

Among these little happenings we must not fail to include the steadily increasing interchange of men and ideas between our Churches and universities. This coming and going of preachers and teachers between England and America has no immediate effect upon the hurrying course of public affairs. Those who are concerned in it think of it as the seed growing secretly in the deeper soil of our permanent common concerns. Some of us have been led to conclude that history cannot always be made by official pronouncements which proceed from the top downwards, from

Utopian abstractions to stubborn facts. We have had to conclude that quite as often history matures from the homely, patient, and often relatively obscure transactions of individual give and take. It is in this faith that we have become doubly jealous, particularly at this time, for every leisurely occasion given to Englishmen and Americans to meet and to know each other better.

Without denying to my fellow citizens of other ancestries their native and hereditary loyalties to many diverse European fatherlands, I do not depart from the fact in saying that there are many of us, particularly in the New England Churches and universities and colleges, who look to England as the pit whence we were digged. When our minds and hearts turn eastward across the Atlantic, and when the day's rest or the day's work brings us here, we have no option other than the glad and grateful admission that, "clay of the pit whence we were digged yearns to its fellow clay."

This thought was constantly in my mind in writing and giving these two rather informal lectures. In their actual delivery they served some of us in this stead. I pass them on to print in the same spirit and with the same intention.

WILLARD L. SPERRY.

*Oxford,*

*May 23, 1927.*





# THE PARADOX OF RELIGION

## I

### WHAT RELIGION IS

THERE is abroad among us to-day a very general desire to simplify our religion. During its institutional housekeeping in history, religion accumulates a good deal of that cumbersome and superfluous stuff which Saint Augustine whimsically called, "the baggage of this world."

It may be that religion can afford to occupy its times of large leisure in this irrelevant elaboration of its creeds, codes, and rituals. But in the times of its extremity and opportunity, religion tends to return to the few necessary things required by its own holy spirit. Our age is plainly not one of religion's leisure hours. The perplexities of our Churches and the needs of our world are alike so great that no man who professes and tries to practise religion can be content to waste his life in idle speculations or decorative rites. Ecclesiastical luxury trades are under suspicion. That way lie pedantry, dilettantism, futility, frustration.

How far, then, can we carry the simplification of religion and still leave its vital spirit intact? Plainly there must be some dead line in this matter beyond which the very quality of all religiousness is wanting, and only a bleak residual secularity remains. How simple can a religion become and yet remain religion?

The word "simplicity" is one of the most dangerous and one of the most seductive words in the vocabulary. It has been for centuries a city of refuge for the idler, the sentimentalist, and the cynic. The simple soul, we tell each other in those hours when the modern world is too much with us, is the soul which feeds upon the English Bible and Milton, to the conscious or unconscious neglect of Bergson and Einstein. The simple life is the life which renounces the chaotic worldliness of the great cities for the homely piety of the deep country. Two generations ago Henry Thoreau walked into the Town Hall of Concord, Massachusetts, and resigned from the United States. What a magnificently simple solution of the problem of his intolerable lot! Our resignation from our time and place shall be forthcoming.

May my Life  
Express the image of a better time,  
More wise desires, and simpler manners.

But the processes of the simple life to which we return prove to be vastly more laborious than

those of the complex life which we renounce. This simple life turns out to be gratuitous hard work, and little more. The primary human needs are satisfied only by an incredible and entirely unnecessary drudgery. This drudgery may serve as an anodyne to dull our discontent, but it compares unfavourably, in its self-imposed ways and means, with the labour-saving devices of the world we have left.

Simplicity of life, so achieved, means merely impoverishment of life, impoverishment both of its outer circumstance and its inner concern. This evangelical poverty, always so lovely in its intention, and often so lovely in its first fine careless rapture, tends to degenerate into mental and moral mendicancy, a pauper content with the crumbs of contemporary achievement which fall from the tables spread by more resolute natures. The truth is that no man ever succeeded in recovering the lost simplicity of any one of the world's golden and elusive yesterdays. It would seem to be against nature and morality to go back to anything in this world, even to those wiser desires and simpler manners of the better time that is past. "Is not the arrow beyond thee?"

Impoverishment of life not only fails to solve the problem to which it is addressed, it raises a new problem of its own, that diminution of vitality which always attends a too drastic reduction of our normal human interests. Hear a homely

parable from the world of modern machinery. The man who is buying a motor-car desires the simplest machine that is practicable. The dealer will address him with a paradox. Given the tangled and crowded condition of modern traffic, the motor must be flexible. The most flexible motor is not that with a few cylinders, but that with many cylinders. If a mistaken economy has led the designer to cut down the number of cylinders to a minimum, the car is for ever in danger of stalling as the engine approaches the critical moment of dead centre. The car with many cylinders never gets near that bad moment. Before one set of cylinders have finished their thrust on the drive shaft another set of cylinders have picked up the load. Hence the mechanical paradox, familiar to any sixteen-year-old boy in a wayside garage, that a six- or eight-cylindere car is a much simpler machine to drive through modern traffic than the primitive "evangelical" one-cylindere car.

The fact is that this word "simplicity" is usually entirely misread. It does not mean impoverishment of circumstance. It means singleness of principle. The best examples of simplicity, whether among machines or men, are those in which factors which at first present themselves as mutually exclusive in substance and antithetical in operation, are brought into some kind of reciprocity.

There would seem to be no structural principle



for the organization of a human life so sure to get us into trouble as a wilful denial of the patent contrasts of experience, and a deliberate reduction of our interests to one set of concerns all of a kind. Much of our spiritual inanition is simply a witness to our failure to anticipate the moment of mental and moral dead centre. We have not made advance provision for that critical time when one interest having been exhausted, we shall need the powerful thrust of an antithetical interest from another source to bear upon "the heavy and the weary weight of all this unintelligible world."

We are coming, now, to the point where we are ready to venture a tentative answer to the question, How far can we simplify our religion? Plainly, we cannot reduce it to one set of ideas and concerns all of a kind and all bearing upon life from the same source. Religion requires more than one idea. The simplest religions are those which succeed in organizing the contradictions of life into some kind of reciprocal cycle. That is supremely true of the religion which most of us know best, the Christian religion. When, for example, Robert Browning said that he was no longer able to determine whether soul helped body more, or body soul, that was another way of saying that he had discovered the secret of the simple life.

Now the main antithetical concerns of every truly simple religion are two. The first is the

best idea that I can form about myself; the second is the best idea that I can get of the universe around me. I probably begin my life by considering these objects of thought separately. Each seems to be self-sufficient. I think, therefore, I am. Of the indubitable and almost impervious actuality of my self-consciousness there is no reasonable doubt. To doubt that is to doubt all. But there is the outer world also. It was here long before I came. I cannot pass the days of my pilgrimage without reckoning with it. It will still be here when I am gone. Plainly I must concede my universe an independent existence of its own.

But each of these inevitable objects of my thought takes on a more and more disconcerting aspect. If I concentrate upon one of them to the neglect of the other, that concentration does not make the object of my thought more real. On the contrary, such exclusive thinking makes it more unreal.

There is a point—as most of us know, to our bitter sorrow—beyond which self-examination ceases to be a blessing and becomes a curse. Years ago a friend wrote me, “I have done with introspection. It is of its father the devil, and has cost me all the bitterest hours of my life.” Every man of us has ventured far enough into the recesses of that cavern to have passed quite out of the sane light of wholesome day, and to have come upon some goblin-haunted area of utter

unreality. It may well be that God dwells in the Interior Castle, but the devil lives there too. That way lies madness. Royce knew—"In the isolated dungeon of my self-consciousness I rot away unheeded and alone."

On the other hand, if I forswear introspection and spend my life in the impersonal, dispassionate thought of the world around me, that world, also, tends to lose its reality. The fact at which I look turns stale and unprofitable under my gaze, and finally crumbles to Dead Sea fruit in my hand. As Huxley once said, "If you want to get a duffer at a scientific investigation, get a man who has no possible personal interest in the result."

We cannot think without thinking either about ourselves or about our world. But in one direction we are apt to go mad; in the other direction we are apt to go stale. Either way we lose what we call "the sense of reality" in life. Plainly, unless a man is to go mad or go stale, he must think both of himself and of his world, even though the two do not always seem congruous.

We are in the position of a man standing with outstretched arms holding two objects which are moving apart. If we hold on with both hands we are able to do something with either extreme. Our pull on the one comes from our firm grasp of the other. But if we let go with the right hand we lose the purchase for a tug with the left hand. So long as our hold is not broken on

either side we feel the physical sensation of "reality" in our taut members. The mind of man, in its normal relation to the two major objects of all thought, is in somewhat the same position. This state of tension is not comfortable. No serious thinker has ever pretended that it was comfortable. With Walt Whitman, we might wish that we could go and live with the animals, they are so placid and untroubled by thought. Nevertheless, this state of tension is the price we pay for being a little higher than the animals. It is what makes life real.

For what is this "sense of reality"? We achieve it when two actualities which at first seem to us to be independent are discovered to belong together and are brought into relationship in a single act of thought. The pieces of a picture puzzle spread out on the table are, in their initial chaos, actual, but unreal. Only the finished puzzle is real. This is probably the secret of the fascination of that pastime. It is a symbol of life. For it is precisely this ability of the human mind to make these marriages in their many permutations and combinations which delivers us from madness, staleness, unreality, and increases our strong persuasion of the reality of things.

When these two actualities are the final facts with which every man is ultimately concerned, all of himself and all of his world, the result of thinking of them together is that very intense



kind of reality which we call "religion." Broadly speaking, we must say that when a man succeeds in thinking of himself and his universe within the compass of a single idea, he has "the religious consciousness." It has been said that this awakening to the dual consciousness of self and God is man's fall. In a sense this is true. The times of his innocence and ignorance, when one of these objects of thought could suffice him, are gone. There will always be a tension in his thinking, thereafter. But if this tension marks his fall and is his misery, it is also the sting to his quest for peace and the pledge of his salvation. The great, uplifted figures of human history, with arms outstretched upon the contradiction of things in the effort to compass the paradox, always betray this tension. And it is this tension which draws all men to them.

Lest all this seem rather vague, it is worth while to restate this proposition concretely. We should have to search far to find a better example of this tension of the religious paradox than that which is furnished us in the life of Abraham Lincoln. The example has the advantage of not being wholly untimely or irrelevant. Both in England and America the sombre events of the last ten or fifteen years have led us to suspect that Abraham Lincoln knew some things about making war and peace which it would have been as well for us to have known.

Happily for our purposes, Lincoln belonged to

no Church. There are, therefore, no grave clothes of ecclesiasticism to be stripped off the figure. It is true that since his death sectarians have asserted that he was, variously, a Baptist by birth and heredity, a Presbyterian by habitual church attendance during his later years, a Universalist and a Unitarian by private conviction, and by secret affinities a Roman Catholic, a Quaker, a Methodist, a Spiritualist, and a Freemason. So much for the cities through which the living seer begged his bread.

The truth is at once more simple and more complex. To the end of his days Lincoln was a man of profound melancholy, and this trait settled into a kind of fatalism more akin to the submission of the savage or the saint than to the determinism of the scientist. He believed that there was a Will at work in this world ruling and overruling the affairs of men, and he did not hesitate to identify this principle as the Will of God. On the other hand, he had grown up as a pioneer in a primitive society, and the conditions of his early life had required of him a resourceful power of initiative which matured as a strong self-reliance, an almost implacable self-will.

This is by no means an uncommon combination. More often than otherwise, men of strong will are fatalists by profession. But the fatalist is apt to resolve the paradox by an uncritical identification of the Will of God with his own strong intention. Lincoln is not unique in having

held to this double principle of necessity and freedom. He is profoundly significant, however, for his reluctance and inability to achieve any facile reconciliation of the two.

He kept, to the end of his days, an agonized awareness of these two wills at work in him, and he tended to emphasize rather than to minimize the possible discrepancies between them. He seems to have known intuitively what most other men have to learn by costly experience—that he was safe in devotion to one of these wills only as he referred it to the supplement of the other. His inner history is the record of this unrelieved tension.

During the critical years of his life, those of the American Civil War, his worship was divided between the altars of two gods. He worshipped, first, at the altar of the God of Battles. That immanent God was, in the very nature of the case, a Being who spoke to him through his own deepest moral convictions, as his own universalized good conscience. He worshipped, in the second place, at the altar of the God above the Battle. This transcendent Being was the constant possibility of a cosmic correction of his policies and purposes, the residual otherness which would remain when he had done his best.

The God of Battles gave him power. The God above the Battle gave him perspective. He knew that the exercise of power without historical and moral perspective meant fanaticism. He knew

that the possession of perspective without the power to act effectively meant futility. He seems to have aspired always to the exercise of power in perspective. Yet he seems never to have compassed this dual devotion in any single moment of his experience.

It is rather the fashion in these experimental days to regard the doctrines of the immanence and transcendence of God as the conventions of abstract thought which has a predilection for pairing off its ideas. The life of Lincoln rescues these two doctrines from the realm of platitude, and gives them urgency and validity. We must say of Lincoln, what cannot always be said of statesmen in the times of war, that this ordeal by fire did not cost him his own soul. He kept his soul alive by giving the tragic antithesis of his convictions full scope and by bearing in his own mind and members the painful tension of his divided loyalties.

He had believed since earliest childhood that human slavery was wrong, and he had pledged himself, when his time came, to hit it and to hit hard. He never wavered in that purpose. At a critical moment during the war he made a patriarchal covenant with the God of Battles that, if a coming engagement should issue in victory for the Northern arms, he would declare the slaves free. Following the victory, this Emancipation Proclamation, a step of the most doubtful political and military expediency, was announced to his

Cabinet as a forthcoming fact entirely removed from the area of ordinary ministerial debate. It was his half of a compact made with God. In the same spirit he prayed mightily for a victory at Gettysburg, because, as he told the God of Battles, the cause could not stand another Fredericksburg or Chancellorsville. The issue at Gettysburg further confirmed his faith in an immanent principle of righteousness in human history, with which the Northern cause seemed to be identified.

But this assurance was daily challenged by sober second thoughts of quite another kind. He was troubled by the reports that the Southern armies were more in prayer than the Northern armies. He knew that God could not answer the prayers of both, whether more effectual or less effectual. He feared that God might not answer the prayers of either. It was in this spirit of agnostic devotion and of utter humility that he wrote the Second Inaugural Address.

“The Almighty has his own purposes. ‘Woe unto the world because of offenses! For it must needs be that offenses come; but woe to that man by whom the offense cometh.’ If we shall suppose that American slavery is one of those offenses which, in the Providence of God, must needs come, but which having continued through His appointed time, He will now remove, and that He gives to both North and South this terrible war, as the woe due to those by whom



the offense came, shall we discern therein any departure from those Divine attributes which the believers in a living God always ascribe to Him? Fondly do we hope—fervently do we pray—that this mighty scourge of war may speedily pass away. Yet, if God wills that it continue until all the wealth piled by the bondman's two hundred and fifty years of unrequited toil shall be sunk, and until every drop of blood drawn with the lash shall be paid by another drawn with the sword, as was said three thousand years ago, so still must it be said, 'The judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether.' "

These words cost us nothing in repetition. But we have only to consult our own experience in the years nearer at hand to understand what they must have cost the man who first spoke them. This sombre suggestion that God may not intend what we intend is not the spoils usually offered to prospective victors in the warfares of this world. Neither military nor political expediency could have prompted these words, they were wrung out of a troubled man by the travail of his own soul. Nearer than this we cannot come to Lincoln's religion—this public prayer to the God above the Battle to save the God of Battles from himself.

This man knew, then, as few men have known, of what stuff religion is made. It is made out of an intimate and proven self-knowledge. It is made out of the vivid awareness of a principle or

person operative in Nature and history whose ways do not consistently manifest themselves as our ways. He never quite decided whether he was to make use of God or whether God was making use of him. He did not solve that problem because, as we shall see, it is insoluble on those terms. Each of these alternatives tacitly denies the reality of the paradox, and Lincoln clung to the paradox. Meanwhile his history inclines us to ask whether these antitheses offer natural and normal ways of getting our religious case stated.

If we may trust general evidence upon this matter, we shall conclude that the riddle of likeness and unlikeness, which is the mental tension created by the paradox, is the occasion for most of our profitable and productive thinking. Apparently the human mind is never so alert as when it is intently engaged in observing precisely these identities and differences. The man who habitually plays with paradoxes is too often suspected of doing intellectual parlour magic for the bewilderment of the lay mind. The truth more often is that he is hot after realities.

There is a long discussion of this matter in Wordsworth's prose preface to the *Lyrical Ballads*. The poet is there immediately engaged in trying to discover the source of the peculiar emotional pleasure which we get from verse. He concludes that this pleasure is derived from the repetition of word patterns, as sounds and stresses, with constant slight variations within the pattern.

The slight modification of the "repeat" of poetry is a constant surprise, and in the element of surprise lies the pleasure. But Wordsworth does not restrict this principle of the pleasurable variations of pattern to the formal arts. He goes on to say that this paradoxical observation of difference in identity is the source of all those powerful emotions and ideas which are associated with sex, that the observation of this baffling likeness and unlikeness is the stuff of all serious conversation, that it is the chief spring and feeder of the mind's best activity. Indeed, "Upon the accuracy with which similitude in dissimilitude and dissimilitude in similitude are perceived depends our taste and moral feeling."

We are here very near the place where poetry passes into religion. But the principle holds all along the line. Any homely test suffices to prove the accuracy of Wordsworth's thesis. In the Egyptian Room of the British Museum there is, in one of the cases, a leathern slipper which is said to be about six thousand years old. The civilization of the Upper Nile in the year 4000 B.C. must have been very unlike the life now lived in twentieth-century England or America. Between those years and these there is a gulf which imagination, much less accurate knowledge, finds it hard to bridge. Yet that slipper as it lies there seems to belong quite as appropriately to our time as to its own time. Its cut and sewing and beadwork would sell it over the counter of

any shoe shop in a High Street or a Main Street. This homely bit of human equipment seems to shuttle back and forth between the boundaries of history. It belongs to both civilizations. It stirs the perception of similitude in dissimilitude and dissimilitude in similitude. No ordinarily thoughtful observer can be immune to the paradox which it suggests, and that paradox is not a pretty artifice of words, but a profound insight into the reality of history.

The religious consciousness is that kind of consciousness. Whenever we follow the lead of such experiences to their conclusion, trying to compass the whole of life, we are within the paradox of religion. Theology has its conventional doctrines of sin, forgiveness, reconciliation, redemption, salvation. But these ideas are simply perceptions of an ultimate dissimilitude or similitude. Religion has only two things to say. Either it is confessing man's tragic unlikeness to God, or it is giving joyful thanks for man's reassuring likeness to God. All else is derivative or irrelevant.

Now no man can say just what he means and all that he means by the word "God." Perhaps we speak that word too easily. It was said of a certain English novelist of the last century, who was much concerned with these matters, that he seldom spoke the name of God; "he saved it for the great occasions." Most of us would profit by that fine reticence. But whatever else we mean,

we mean that there is a principle or person of enduring worth and life in the environing universe. A God who is to meet the requirements of the conception must be conceded so much externality to us.

It fortifies my soul to know  
That, though I perish, truth is so;  
That howsoe'er I stray or range,  
Whate'er I do, Thou dost not change,  
I steadier step when I recall  
That, if I slip, Thou dost not fall.

Such a divine environment will always perplex us by its likeness and unlikeness to ourselves. Sometimes we seem condemned, like the *Wandering Jew*, to roam through a realm of things wholly alien. Sometimes this order will wear the welcome of a homeland for our souls.

Our fortunes in resolving the paradox will depend upon our individual circumstance. A familiar hymn speaks, with fine fidelity to experience, of the religious life as a "beautiful vicissitude." The resolution of the riddle of likeness and unlikeness, as its statement, will be conditioned by this vicissitude. While the major systems of religious faith and practice do not absolve us from personal adventure by misplaced confidence in hired words, they are not unwilling to suggest the normal sequence of ideas. One also of your own English scholars has put the case with fine precision :

"The great religious conceptions of mankind are scenes of solitariness: Prometheus chained



to the rock, Mahomet brooding in the desert, the meditations of the Buddha, the solitary Man on his Cross. . . . Thus religion is solitariness, and if you are never solitary you are never religious. . . . Religion is what the individual does with his own solitariness. It runs through three stages if it evolves to its final satisfaction. It is the transition from God the void to God the enemy, and from God the enemy to God the companion.”<sup>1</sup>

You will see at once that the philosopher, in those striking phrases about God the enemy and God the companion, is simply stating in metaphor religion’s perception of that dissimilitude and similitude which the poet identifies as the chief spring and feeder of our life. His words do not admit of elaboration, but we should not fail to follow the sequence of their beautiful vicissitude. The perception of dissimilitude lies between the perception of solitude and the perception of likeness.

God the void is our vivid self-consciousness with the loneliness bred of that kind of knowledge. It is not the present academic fashion to make much of solitude as the brewing place of religion. The academic conventions require full concession of the social origins of most primitive religions. But a good deal of water has gone under the bridge since the tribe first hunted and warred and initiated each new generation into its corporate

<sup>1</sup> *Religion in the Making*, Alfred North Whitehead, pp. 6, 7, 9.



mysteries. Ezekiel wrote the eighteenth chapter of his prophecy. Plotinus meditated upon the flight of the alone to the Alone. Pascal was terrified by the eternal silence of the infinite spaces.

There are more lonely men in the world to-day than there have ever been before. The kind of knowledge of ourselves and our universe which we have been achieving makes for that loneliness. The unconscious mind and the stellar island systems are getting very far apart. The thin terrestrial veneer of social solidarity represented by great cities, rapid travel, daily news from the ends of the earth, and an urbane cosmopolitan culture, do not successfully disguise this stuff of solitude beneath. We know a loneliness in time and space which primitive man could never have felt. We are never quite able to dismiss the dread lest this loneliness be a final and irrevocable fact. What if the mind be

One, poor, finite object, in the abyss  
Of infinite Being, twinkling restlessly ?

Hell for us is no longer the place of everlasting fiery torment ; it is a much more homely and sinister eventuality : it is what is meant and all that is meant by the sum of the reflections prompted by the sight of a neglected grave. To look at such a grave in some untended corner of its acre ; to know, beyond all question of a doubt, that there lies what was mortal of a human being

whom no one on earth now holds in remembrance and loving care ; to suspect that, wanting human care, there is no other care ; to ponder the grim conclusion that all human lives may come to that in the end ;—that is Hell. One of the most terrible verdicts ever passed upon human life was that tentative inference from the obvious fact, “ And some there be which have no memorial ; who are perished as though they had never been.”

The English-speaking world has rallied in the last few years to restore the church and to save the yews and elms at Stoke Poges. It is not that that old church and those old trees are without similarly imperilled peers. Men’s minds turn to that place because that churchyard once inspired a song which ventured to voice, in plain and unaffected lines, its confidence that man’s obscurity and solitude are not final. It prophesied for all those homely souls, hardly perceived by their kind before they were forgotten by their kind, the bosom of their Father and their God. Gray’s *Elegy* is a repudiation of the sceptical dogma of the neglected grave, but it owes its appeal to the common mind of man quite as much to its initial realism as to its final faith.

No man has ever succeeded in making, or can make, a religion out of the self-sufficing power of his own deeply-felt loneliness. Religion requires some cause or society or principle or person which promises to endure and to take our lives

into its perpetual care. All seeking after God is the quest for such a divine society or Being.

It is just here that the normal sequence of our perceptions of the universe around us must be strictly followed. At the time when we are seeking a saviour for our solitude we must beware of the half-gods. The half-gods are the echoes of our own voices, the mirrored reflections of our own imperfect natures and characters. Only God the enemy can save us from the half-gods.

That phrase about " God the enemy " is one of religion's hardest sayings, but it is also one of religion's most necessary sayings. For unless the paradox of religion is to be destroyed, leaving only an unfulfilled human solitude, it requires a constant perception of the divine dissimilitude. It is a curious fact, although one entirely familiar to historians in this field, that the religions of humanism are always short-lived. Century after century they are inaugurated with enthusiasm. They meet with much immediate success because they appeal so directly to human desire and conform so readily to human nature. Yet they come to little in history and fail to redeem their pledges. Their congenial god is "human-all-too-human."

Every humanistic religion comes too soon and too easily at God the companion. The human heart, as Calvin once said, is a perpetual forge of idols. An idol is an imaged or imagined god created too closely in your own likeness. The

idol wants the cool aloofness and otherness of the great objective facts of the universe. It does not offer enough opposition and correction to its devotees. It does not save its worshippers, because it only intensifies the loneliness of its maker, a maker who has never apprehended that principle of friendship which inspired Emerson's bold saying, "Let thy friend be to thee a kind of beautiful enemy."

We who profess and call ourselves Christians take much comfort from the familiar words of Jesus about the Fatherhood of God. But there is such a thing as coming too cheaply at that solace. Those comfortable words of Christ are not historically an isolated utterance. They presuppose and are conditioned by the uncomfortable words of the law-givers and prophets. It was only after His race had wrestled for a thousand years with its native and strong perception of the divine dissimilitude that Jesus ventured His mature perception of the divine similitude.

The divine dissimilitude is that opposition in the universe of which we are all conscious. It takes time to overcome that opposition, to search out its secret, and to compel its capitulation. The two kinds of knowledge which religion requires, knowledge of ourselves and knowledge of the outer order, must achieve some parity of quality and degree before their essential congruity is manifest. Too many of us to-day are shirking the mastery of some single divine aspect of the

totality of the things around us. We are trying to compound a religion out of our intolerable loneliness, and slight intimations of a possible divine Being gathered hastily and at random from superficial knowledge of the world around. No real religion can be fashioned out of this aching solitude within and a bowing acquaintance with ambitious outlines of science and history.

Personal religion is always more painfully achieved, and when achieved is an intimate and often a parochial affair. The lives of the indubitable saints usually manifest a baffling provincialism. But that provincialism is not an accident. It betrays the sure insight of the genuinely religious man into the nature of his problem: the need of knowing the God without as well as he knows the God within. That means paying the price of grappling with a stubborn and reluctant truth of outer things, as who should say, "I will not let thee go except thou bless me."

These saintly examples, in their achieved equilibrium between the inner and the outer worlds, are not without significance for us to-day. It is often said that in the opportunity for religion our age compares unfavourably with the great ages which have preceded it, since the felt unity of life which was in other times a commonplace is now denied to us. In place of this unified synoptic vision of all things, we have our diversified and departmental knowledge and endeavour.



The source of our contemporary irreligion is thus ascribed to that extreme specialization which makes the religious view of things so hard.

I wonder is this wholly true? The specialist, as we know him to-day, is a man who devotes his life to a single aspect of truth and who restricts his life to a single type of activity. The truth which he seeks is not a commonplace. The task which he accepts is not easy, and its tools lie awkwardly in his hand. An accurate knowledge of himself, his interests and powers, has led him to elect this field. Only an equally accurate knowledge of the truth to which he has addressed himself can give him mastery of that field.

By a long and disciplinary process the modern specialist achieves a strange identification of himself with his truth and his craft. A mutual interpenetration takes place. The reluctant truth and the awkward technique are conquered and become second nature. There is something morally very fine about the exact knowledge and the superb skill of the modern specialist. Such a man has about him an indubitable touch of true saintliness.

All the while he has been working out a paradox. He has been attaining a similitude which lies on the far side of a clearly perceived dissimilitude. His mature consciousness of being at last perfectly at home in his own field, which once seemed so alien and hard, is in the particular terms of his life the transition from God the void to God the



enemy, and from God the enemy to God the friend. The sequences of his life have been those of the normal religious experience. And if such a man knows that in his chosen work God the void, as his own native capacities, is seeking God the companion in his mastered truth and duty, then we shall do such a man a grave injustice if we deny him a place within the religious paradox.

So we come full circle in our search for a simple religion. This religion is not a barren and impoverished faith. It is said of the late Baron von Hügel, that he "did not love complexity for its own sake, but saw it as a reality, and believed that great simplifications meant great losses of spiritual values." In something of his spirit the man who knows of what antithetical stuff the religious consciousness is compounded, will suspect those statements of religion which want the paradox. And the peace which religion promises him will be the peace which marks the tension of the normal spiritual life.

Some months ago, travelling along in a train at the end of a sultry summer day, I saw a thunderstorm off on the horizon, playing between two black clouds separated by blue sky. The lightning was discharging from one of the clouds into the other. The two clouds seemed to be seeking some kind of equipoise or stability in their mutual relation. Occasionally they reached this moment of rest. But no sooner had the lightning ceased than, one or the other of the clouds gathering to

itself fresh wisps of wandering vapour, the relationship became unstable and the incessant play of the lightning began again. Even at a great distance one almost felt physically the energies released for that glorious transaction.

In something the same way the truly religious man, the religious book, the religious situation impress us. We are made aware that a great transaction is taking place. Man is seen or heard in conscious communion with his God. He has girt up his loins, has stood upon his feet, to meet the inquisition of the whirlwind. There is nothing in all our world so dramatic, so absorbing, so exhilarating as these authentic statements of the ultimate paradox of life. They have infinite variety, but no essential variableness. They betray the constant tension of that divine discontent which is their saving habit. They say one thing only : " O God, thou hast made us for thyself, and our hearts are restless until they find rest in thee."

## II

### WHAT RELIGION DOES

WE have described religion as that real life of which a man becomes increasingly conscious as he finds his place in a divine order at once like and unlike him.

Religion thus conceded in theory must go into effect in practice, since all thought is simply action in suspense. When we begin to translate the idea into conduct, we have to decide what it is that religion proposes to do. What is the intention of this relationship between God and man? The life of man is often compared to a river, the nature of God to the sea. Which way does the tide set across the bar that marks their meeting place? Is religion an experience in which, "far back through creeks and inlets making, comes silent flooding in the main," or is it an experience where "that which drew from out the boundless deep turns again home"? Does God enter into this relationship to do things for man, or does man enter into this relationship to do things for God?

There are at least three accounts of this experience. They are stated in the general conceptions

of the religious relationship which we know as Magic, Mysticism, and Grace.

Magic seems to have been the natural man's earliest interpretation of his relation to the powers-not-himself. There is substantial agreement among all scholars as to the distinctive characteristic of magic, and the word, when strictly used, has its clear definition. Magic is the attempt to subject the higher powers to man's coercive control. Human beings have always believed in the existence of such higher powers. Some of these powers have seemed hostile to man, others friendly to man. Magic is the manipulation of these powers, so that the malice of the one may be averted, the help of the other assured.

This attempt to manipulate the supernatural may have had some empirical occasion. It is conceivable that in his dealings with Nature primitive man may have observed untoward or happy issues for which his own endeavours did not account. The search for a supernatural cause may have suggested some accidental word or deed which had unconsciously invoked the god. Thereafter this word or deed might have been consciously invoked to manipulate the gods.

Be this as it may, the full-blown magician as we meet him, whether in ancient or in modern times, is a man with an armoury of rites, incantations, and formulæ which are supposed to enable him and his clients to coerce the universe in their own favour. No appropriate inner disposition is

required of the devotee of magic; the correct formula is supposed to operate automatically upon the god, and to guarantee the result in advance. This is the doctrine of the *opus operatum*. The transaction is as impersonal as switching on the electric light or stepping on the self-starter of a motor-car.

Plainly this account of religion needs examination. To begin with, it rests upon a conscious or unconscious lie. The ascription of higher power to the god is either self-deception or subterfuge. Since the god of magic must respond to the correct manipulation, he is not the superior power—he is an inferior power. The magician himself, who knows the correct formula, is the higher power. He can make the gods obey. Every magical religion is, therefore, an unconscious or an unashamed deification of our human wisdom and self-will.

The practical difficulty is equally serious. The advance guarantee of the desired result is not always redeemed by the event. The correct formula does not always work. All primitive religion, in which the magical intention is prominent, betrays traces of the consequent perplexity and anxiety. These perplexities persist among us to-day as “the problem of unanswered prayer.”

In more unsophisticated times the magical practitioner did not hesitate to serve warning on the non-co-operating god. An old Egyptian text recommends the divinity not to be too inde-

pendent and intractable. "If you do not put our deceased in touch with his family we shall withhold the best morsels of food from your altar. There will be no more bread for you." It is as well for the god to be reminded occasionally of the source of his daily bread. The priest at Heliopolis offered for the salutary consideration of his god this daily prayer, "O divine spirit of Heliopolis, thou art safe if we are safe."

When the formula first breaks down, the magician concludes that his god is asleep or on a journey. When it persists in breaking down, he is driven to the sceptical conclusion that there is no god. The premise of magic being the uncriticized self-will of the natural man, it never occurs to the magician to revise his theory in the light of sobering experience. Being immune to any profitable self-criticism, he can only deny his god.

Down this road of the repeated failure of magic to give what it guarantees, lies most of this world's agnosticism and atheism. Even at this latest time the man who tells you that he has tried religion and has found there is nothing in it, merely means that he has done his best to cajole or to coerce the universe in his own behalf and has failed in the attempt. That "loss of religion" which, generation after generation, men confess is in most cases the inevitable discovery that this mechanical manipulation of the power-not-ourselves is not uniformly successful. Appar-



ently the experience of the race goes for little in this matter. Every man has to have his own personal disillusionment as to the validity and efficacy of a magical faith.

The nobler spirits in human history have always known that this account of the religious relationship was inaccurate and more or less contemptible. The rooted distaste of the Old Testament for the soothsayer has its origins in the ethical conviction that this constant reference of God to man reverses the values. When, in his time of temptation, Jesus fortified Himself with the old prohibition of the law, "Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God," He was denying Himself what had been forbidden all men—our natural inclination in our extremity to put God to the final test. A good conscience forbids these self-willed trials of our universe. Not only do they not succeed, but they pervert the true nature of man's relation to God.

Crossing the ocean not long ago, I was talking with one of the ship's officers about those gales which swept across the North Atlantic in the early months of 1926. Ship after ship at that time went down by the beam ends or was sunk by the seas which smashed in the hatches. There was no residual trace of primitive magic in that man's memory of those days or in his attitude towards his element. He spoke with an agnostic humility of the way of a ship in a storm at sea. Fewer men would make shipwreck of their faith

if they had learned to think of their universe as that sailor thought of the sea—a scene for the manifestation of a power not uniformly amenable to human control.

Mysticism takes precisely the opposite view of the religious relationship. Religion, as the mystic practises it, is not a way of compelling God to do things for man, it is a way of compelling man to do things for God. A noble exemplar of this tradition says, “ I would be to the Eternal Goodness what his own hand is to a man.”

Given this single-minded devotion to God, it is clear that man’s selfishness is the one source of all his religious doubts and miseries. Religion in practice becomes the attempt to get rid of self-interest in the advance assurance that the life emptied of self will be automatically filled by God. The Middle Ages had an ineradicable fear of the vacuum. We cannot understand at this late time the spiritual shock which men endured first at the theory, and then even more at the demonstration of the vacuum. The inability of the classical mystics to conceive the vacuum must have confirmed them in their religious faith that the life emptied of self would be filled automatically with God. Let one of the noblest mystics of all time, the anonymous author of the *Theologia Germanica*, state his case :

“ What did the devil do else, but that he claimed to be somewhat? This setting up of his I, and Me, and Mine, and the like were his going

astray and fall. This is the bite that Adam made in the apple. A man should stand so free, being quit of himself—that is, of his I, and Me, and Mine, and the like—that in all things he should no more seek or regard himself, than if he did not exist. The more a man followeth after his own self-seeking and self-will the farther off he is from God. Behold one or two words can utter all that hath been said by these many words, ‘Be simply and wholly bereft of self.’ For nothing burneth in hell but self-will.”

The magical intention is here dismissed, in that terrific metaphor, as the fuel of Gehenna. The mystic will have nothing to do with it. The self is to be sacrificed to God, lost in God.

But just as magic presents certain difficulties in operation, so mysticism has not been without its own peculiar problems. This regimen of mysticism consists of a daily unremitted self-abnegation, in the hope that success will ensure the divine compensation. The mystic has a fine phrase about “digging out the roots of self-love with the knife of self-hatred.” This may be austere religion in its intention; but it is dubious moral strategy.

The selfless life to which we aspire can never be realized by the perpetual attempt to think badly of ourselves. If you spend your days whetting the knife of remorseless self-hatred on the stone of relentless self-knowledge and digging savagely at the stubborn roots of self-love in the stony

soil of your life's allotment, you cannot be said by any stretch of the imagination to be living an entirely unself-conscious life. Self-hatred, like self-love, takes self more seriously than this mystical aspiration warrants. No man has ever won a direct frontal attack on self. Self is conquered by a flank attack, by "the expulsive power of a new affection."

Even were we to succeed in making a temporary vacuum of the place one filled with self-interest, there is no guarantee that the incoming tenant will be God. There is, on the contrary, the sombre chance that seven devils worse than the first may come to carouse there. The Eternal Goodness is not the only principle in the universe which finds work for idle hands to do.

The mystic knows only one way of proving the spirits which take possession of his self-emptied nature. "By their fruits ye shall know them." But these fruits have reference to this world at hand, and to human needs and uses. Therefore the self which was thrust out of the front door as a usurper must be let in again through the back door as an appraiser. There is no escape from the initial and the ultimate subjectivity of all real religious living. "I know that it is true because it finds me." This was Coleridge's method of defending the inspiration of the Bible. In one form or another that direct reference to the consent of conscience points the way to the final seat of all religious authority. I know that

God is true because He "finds me." To deny or to destroy that court of final inner appeal is to make religion the merest guesswork. All centres of external religious authority gain their hold over us by our inward response to their address and appeal. Therefore, the mystic's gallant attempt to commit suicide for God's sake would seem to be as self-defeating as the magician's attempt to deify his own will.

Sometimes the hunter out on the moors or in the deep forest comes upon the skeletons of two stags, their antlers interlocked in what proved to have been their death struggle. So it is with these two conventional figures in the religious scene. We always find the magician and the mystic contesting the supremacy of the religious area. In all practical matters of regimen and conduct they are point for point antithetical. Their rival creeds and codes are such that if they become finally involved with each other, no victory for the one is easily possible, since the vitality of the other is so great. They tend, therefore, to cancel each other out.

Lest we suppose that these two men are remote figures of interest only to the anthropologist or the theologian, it is worth while to identify them in their present incarnations. The truth is that these men are simply ourselves. Whatever our formal religious professions or practices, our daily life in this world tends to become a compound of magic and mysticism.



Most of us still have a stubborn strain of native and unregenerate selfishness. We justify this selfishness either as the biological condition of survival or as that expedient altruism which enables us to live off our own beneficiaries. Yet in spite of this frank or disguised selfishness, we have the capacity for facing about upon our native selves, and in times of great emergency or opportunity we can do the utterly unselfish thing. The occasional splendid cause now and then converts the magician of us into a mystic who is truly thankful when God matches him with the great hour and the great duty.

This line between the magician and the mystic does not coincide with most of the rough-and-ready distinctions between men with which we are familiar. We have all been spiritually cross-bred from these two strains.

Given the immediate situation, the line is drawn most accurately, perhaps, as between the men of pure science and the men of applied science. In the modern world the scholar's study and the research laboratory are the lineal spiritual successors to the hermit's cell. In so far as the selfless author of the *Theologia Germanica* has heirs and assigns, these heirs must be sought among such men as Darwin, Faraday, Einstein. They practise the unmercenary love of God in the terms of contemporary concern.

Our leading American physicist, Robert Millikan, has been spending the last few years re-

measuring the speed at which light travels. Since the experiments made in the California mountains have had to be more or less public and have been rather dramatic, the newspapers have been besieging him to know what use is to be made of the slight corrections of the conventional figures furnished by the result. He has constantly replied that the result is no use. The newspapers, which are habituated to the magician's exploitation of America's natural resources, have then inquired, in dull perplexity, why he goes to such trouble and expense if it is all no use. Thus far he has put them off with the whimsical, cryptic reply that he does it "just for the fun of it." But within the last few months he has given us an interpretation of the religion of the pure scientist. "When the modern scientist says that he does it 'for the fun of it,' or 'for the satisfaction he gets out of it,' he is only translating the words of Jesus into the vernacular, 'He that loseth his life shall find it.' It would be hard to find a closer parallel."

For one mystical scientist of this temper there are, however, ninety-nine practitioners of applied science. The pure scientist gets his knowledge by disinterested intellectual endeavour, and apparently only by such endeavour. The man of applied science invests this knowledge for his own profit. The verified formula is coercively applied to Nature for our human gain. Here we have the permanent residue of magic. In so far

as this primitive type of religion had a warrant in the observation of certain persistent uniformities which attended man's uncertain dealings with his world, all the empirical truth of magic has passed over into the keeping of the applied sciences, and seen in retrospect is discovered to have been nascent science.

It follows, therefore, that most of the problems of moral reference which were once involved in the practice of magic now reappear in the field of applied science. As a modern magician I may exhaust a coal-mine, drain an oil well, alter the whole aspect of a countryside by a hydro-electric power plant. I do not ask whether the natural world has any rights of its own. I do not consider the rights of my contemporaries, let alone posterity. It suffices that I have the money and the wit to exploit Nature for my own immediate profit. Whether this is a defensible moral relation to Nature and to my fellow men is an open question.

In other days the American Indians used to sacrifice each year the loveliest maiden of their tribe to the divinity that was supposed to inhabit Niagara. This was undoubtedly a cruel and unnecessary practice. But one sometimes wonders whether they were not in a truer moral relation to that austere fact than those who have supplanted them, only to divert the rapids into turbine tunnels and to mar beyond recall the primitive beauty of that place.

Meanwhile the success of just such coercive conquest of Nature is a tremendous reinforcement of the native magician in us all. These familiar processes seem to suggest that final mechanical control, both of our own natures and environing nature, which automatically will deliver to us that comfort and happiness which we desire.

The modern scientist scoffs at the primitive medicine man and the old rain-maker. He has given up all faith in the rites and incantations of any priesthood. But he still remains a magician in his moral attitudes if he has transferred to his imperious machines the tempers which his forbears manifested in consulting the medicine man. So long as he is indifferent to the rights of the environing universe and is trying to make it obey his arbitrary orders, he is ethically a magician. For the purposes of his moral and spiritual history, the accelerator of a motor-car will do as well as the primitive incantation. Both are the media for the coercive intention.

If we approach our world with this coercive intention of the magician, many of man's most gallant endeavours will be for us a hidden mystery. We shall not be able to understand why Robert Scott went to the South Pole, why Mallory and Irvine elected to "go all out" on Mount Everest, why Millikan perversely prefers his useless experiments in physics, why Einstein plays the violin in those leisure hours which might be more profitably employed in organizing a joint stock

company to market relativity. Thy mystic still is, as he always has been, an absolute riddle to the magician, a man whose gospel is this world's foolishness.

The dividing line between the magician and the mystic, then, does not coincide with those vertical distinctions between organized sects and vocations. It cuts horizontally across every institution and every concern. It divides scientist from scientist and religionist from religionist. There is in the world a large group of determined magicians, who, whether in the fervent and effectual prayers which they offer in church on Sunday or in the equally fervent and effectual endeavour of the other six days spent in the realm of affairs, are consistently trying to get God, Nature, and their fellow men to yield them what their efficient manipulation intends. There is another and probably a smaller group of persons, who, in closets for prayer, in libraries and studios and laboratories, are trying to find truth, beauty, goodness, each for its own sake. This distinction between our useful and our liberal interests was made by Aristotle, and the intervening centuries, so far from effacing it, have emphasized it.

The issue seems reasonably clean cut, and if we must choose, there is no doubt that mysticism is an altogether nobler and more adequate account of religion than magic.

But there are two difficulties common to both



these accounts of religion which should not be overlooked. The initial religious objection to both magic and mysticism is their ultimate indifference to the paradox. We have said that both God and man are necessary to religion. Magic tends to get rid of God; mysticism tends to get rid of man. Magic ignores the stubborn, independent actuality of the outer world; mysticism ignores the equally stubborn actuality of self-consciousness. The magician kills his God; the mystic sacrifices himself. Eucken says that most of our present religious difficulties arise from this source. Either the object is absorbed by a too-powerful subject, or the subject is absorbed by a too-powerful object. In each case the paradox is gone, and with the passing of the paradox the reality which is religion disappears. We have seen that bankrupt magic occasions most of our religious doubts. We can also understand what a modern scholar means when he says that mysticism tends constantly to become the death of religion.

The second objection to these two accounts of religion is quite as grave. In their standardized forms they both seem to presuppose in religion an automatic process of mechanical compensation between God and man. These accounts of religion assume as an axiom "a flux of vital forces flowing from man to god and from god to man. This energy, accumulated sometimes in outer objects, sometimes in individual persons, is in a certain measure free to reverse its own direction

between the two opposite poles." Religion thus tends to become "the mechanical play by which the vital energy is placed to the credit now of the one and now of the other of the two parties; it is the general condition of the universal equilibrium."

Any such account of religion is untrue to the best experiences of our ordinary human lives, religion quite apart. We do not relate ourselves to each other, and to the noblest causes and interests, in this machine-made manner. Our personal relationships are at once more subtle and more spontaneous. Any account of religion which seems to suggest that it is a process of turning wheels and levers, first in ourselves and then in the outer order, so that the constantly changing levels of the inner and the outer worlds may be locked back and forth at will, is plainly false to the more beautiful vicissitudes of life. It is here that our symbol of the thunderstorm breaks down. Religion cannot be merely the stabilization of negatively and positively charged poles, in so far as that process takes place automatically.

We have hinted that magic and mysticism always appear in the religious scene. There is a good deal of religion in our own time which seems to betray this suggestion of the automatic machine. Much of our psychology suggests, in its proposed manipulation of the states of the soul, a residue of magic. Much of our semi-scientific Utopianism is magical in its proposed

method. So, also, the rather sophisticated revival of mysticism, which we have latterly seen, betrays the intrusion of the mechanical tempers of the time. The mystical compensations are supposed to take place automatically. There is danger here. These sunken reefs are charted and buoyed, and we have no business to come to grief on them.

Our situation is reasonably plain, then. We must keep clear of too mechanical accounts of religion, if religion is not to fall below the level of our best human experiences, and we must save the paradox as a faith in the independent actuality and worth, of both God and man. We need some account of the religious relationship which enables us to meet these two requirements.

Historically that account is given us in the doctrine of Grace, with its correlative affirmation as to the Liberty of the Christian man. These doctrines we associate with the theology of the Protestant Reformation. They are not, however, a Protestant monopoly, and were not a Protestant discovery. They appear in much Catholic theology as well, and may be traced through Saint Augustine to the New Testament. In their familiar sixteenth-century statement they represent a thorough-going effort to restore the full paradox and to set the religious relationship in an area of freedom. Tetzels shameless sale of indulgences suggests the timeliness of such an endeavour.

It is difficult for us to understand, at this distance, just what these doctrines meant to the Reformers. The Grace of God addressed to the chosen individual was said to be irresistible, yet his Grace was free and wholly arbitrary. Once it had elected its object, its operation seems to have been construed as more or less mechanical. But it was highly selective in its operation, and consulted its own times and seasons and inclination in the choice of its beneficiaries. There was here no general principle which all men could invoke and which every man might expect. The Sovereignty of God was inviolate, and accountable only to itself. The magician certainly was to be left with no devices for coercing the Grace of God, since that doctrine was the deliberate repudiation of all confidence in human manipulation of the universe. The mystic could not invoke the Grace of God with any assurance of success, even though he did so for God's greater glory, since God's glory is His own, and not to be conceded to another. The Calvinist was willing, if need be, to be damned for the greater glory of God—an eventuality which mysticism never envisaged, much less desired. The devout consort of Jonathan Edwards is said to have derived much spiritual comfort from the blessed doctrine of hell. But no mystic ever sought that comfort. Plainly the doctrine of the Grace of God, whatever its ethical difficulties, was in the sixteenth century an attempt to set the whole religious

relationship in an area where the divine free will was the first principle of all religion.

We have there, then, an intelligible attempt to save the paradox of religion and to discover some God other than the automatic "God from the machine." We must sympathize with this attempt, even though we cannot subscribe to its sixteenth-century formulations. If we are to be saved from subtle magic and sophisticated mysticism, we need some equivalent and contemporary statement of a doctrine of Grace and Freedom. It is not a sixteenth-century reformer, but a twentieth-century philosopher, with no axes to grind, who says, "Art and play have something in them which, though not really divine, is a likeness of divinity; and God may be pictured as an artist, or as playing, with far more verisimilitude than as a scientist or business man. . . . God's will, the will of absolute mind, chooses its ends simply because it chooses them." This is Calvinism, not from the Geneva of yesterday, but from the "Greats" School of contemporary Oxford.

There emerges from this account of the case the one really significant distinction between magic and mysticism on the one hand and Grace on the other hand. The two former construe the religious relationship as a means to an end other than itself. The magician at his worst proposes his daily bread, or the fertility of his flocks or victory in battle, as the end of his religion. At



his best, with his political nostrums and his eugenics, he proposes the Utopia as the goal of religion. The mystic proposes an augmented glory of God which is to accrue from his self-sacrifice.

The believer in Grace and Freedom does not propose either of these ends. He refuses to make God into a means for any terrestrial end. He does not think that he can augment God's glory as religion's celestial end. He has a perverse and peculiar persuasion that the religious relationship is capable of being, and ought to be, its own end. He believes that whenever and wherever God and man meet, there is the end of the road, to which all else in life is simply the means. We need, in our present-day religion, nothing so much as just this conviction. Religion is not a means to any end, it is its own end. This conviction is what we mean and all that we mean when we speak of a "liberal religion," in comparison with which all faiths and practices with some other ulterior end are illiberal.

When Henry Thoreau watched the telegraph wires being strung along past Walden Pond in their westward flight from Massachusetts to Texas, he said that when they were done perhaps Massachusetts would have nothing important to tell Texas and Texas nothing worth while to say to Massachusetts. "All our inventions are improved means to an unimproved end." He put his finger there upon the sorest spot in our

civilization, much of our modern religion being included.

What is religion for? It is not to get bread or win wars or build Utopias or make Vega shine more brightly. If religion is "for" anything, it is only for itself—that is, to achieve the meeting, colloquy, and mutual love of God and man. You will remember that when Alice asked the White Queen for jam on her bread, the White Queen told her she could have no jam, since the rule of the realm was "Jam to-morrow and jam yesterday, but never jam to-day." Persons to whom religion is a means to an end, a process in which God and man mutually exploit each other, must conceive of the immediate experience itself as a dogma of jam to-morrow and jam yesterday, but never jam to-day. There must be about their religion an element of perpetual frustration, either as regret or as hope deferred.

We are accustomed to lament, not without good cause, the joyless quality of much of our modern religion. We can still hear, though from very far off, the old invitation, "Enter into my joy." But we have lost the way. This habitual joylessness of our religion must be ascribed to our dull use of religion as a way of getting at something other than itself. The strained and frustrate expression of the modern strenuous religionist betrays his settled inability to believe in anything other than that elusive jam of to-morrow and of yesterday. Lewis Carroll knew exactly

what he was doing when he gravely corrected us out of the mouth of the child of his whimsical fancy.

The far-off divine event which most of our religious practices presuppose, whether as the Golden Age that is gone or the Utopia that is to come, refuses to think through. The dead hand is laid very cruelly upon us. There is only one hand that can be laid more cruelly upon us, and that is the unborn hand. This perpetual sacrifice of the great immediacies of human life to other ends is the source of most of our irreligion. If it is the mark of the moral man to treat other men as ends in themselves, not as means to ends, then it is the mark of a mature and moral religion to conceive of God and man treating each other in religion as mutually necessary and sufficient ends.

The far-off divine events recede at the one terrestrial extreme into the nebular hypothesis, and anticipate at the other extreme collision with the friendly comet. The only far-off divine event for which the whole creation groans and travails, towards which the whole creation moves, is the communion of man with God and God with man. The homecoming of all His sons to God is the far-off divine event. But what was far off becomes near when at any moment anywhere a son of man lifts up his voice to say, "Abba, Father."

It is for this reason that one of the freemen of

our own time has said that, despite its difficulties, the metaphor of father and son, familiar to us in the Gospels, is on the whole the best figure of speech which we can find to describe the religious relationship. We are here in an area of grace and liberty. It is the son's prerogative to play the prodigal if he will. It is the son's privilege to arise and go to his father when he comes to himself. There is no coercion or compulsion. There is no mechanical compensation. There is only this comradeship and communion, established, violated, neglected, restored, as the stuff of religion.

What matters between the father and his mature son is not their ability to make use of each other. The son who makes use of his father is a bully. The father who makes use of his son is a brute. What matters is their deepening understanding of each other and their joy in one another's concerns and company. Even in our human homes this profound relationship looks always to the time when the large grace of the one and the full manhood of the other enter into their free mutual heritage. Being father to a son, being son to a father, each is worth while for its own sake.

The doctrine of Grace and Freedom still fastens upon this metaphor, drawn from mature experience, and flings it into the Mystery, invokes it immediately, to tell us what our religion is for. If sober thought and discipline persuade us that

within the paradox of likeness and unlikeness as between our God and ourselves some enduring communion is for ever possible, then beyond that religion cannot go. Beyond that life cannot go. This is the place where the moral glory of going on reaches the end of the road. To think God's thoughts after Him, to concede humbly our part in such Grace as He gives us from His Eternal Goodness, to enjoy Him for ever in worship and work, that is the substance of a religion which is truly liberal. In this liberal faith we are content that,

This universe shall pass away—a work  
Glorious—because the shadow of thy might  
A step, a link, for intercourse with thee.







[illegible]

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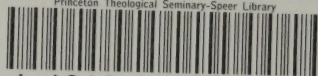
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